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ABSTRACT

Regular classroom teachers who, in addition to teaching their regular students, have to deal with students who do not speak English should follow certain principles in planning curricula and lessons for their non-English speaking students. These teachers should (1) distinguish formal classroom talk from informal talk; (2) allow opportunities for language learners to communicate with native speakers; (3) look for language patterns, words, and phrases that recur; (4) maintain a positive and encouraging attitude; (5) concentrate on the most important aspects of language first, rather than correcting every error that language learners make; (6) establish student-to-student relationships for the non-English speaking student; (7) provide oral tasks for the language learner first, then reading and writing tasks; and (8) prepare exercises based on the essential cultural elements the non-English speaking student must learn. These principles suggest an approach that makes as much use of peer tutors as possible so that the teacher is free to deal with the rest of the class. Also, working with peers involves the English language learner as much as possible in real communication situations. (HOD)

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PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING STUDENTS IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

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In recent years, the United States has experienced a series of waves of immigration, many of them undesired by this country, but nevertheless continuing and unstoppable, despite legislation and public outcry which ignors those of us who point to the Statue of Liberty, asking whether we have given up on our basic principles. Vietnamese, both helicopter people and boat people, Cambodians, the Hmong, Cubans, Haitians, Salvadoreans, and the usual migrant workers from Mexico, all have come here seeking a better life, and, as usual, the schools have been the places where their children congregate, and the schools have had to deal with the results of such immigrations. While the Federal government has moved to eliminate support for bilingual education programs, it has also expressed support for English-as-a Second-Language (ESL) programs but the verbal support has not extended to monetary support. Rather, the federal government has left it up to the states to provide needed funds, typically through over-extended block grants. The result has been that many school districts have not been able to establish formal ESL programs, and so the regular classroom teacher has had to deal with students who do not speak English while also having to teach their regular classes.

Because so many teachers are asking for help in this area and because so many good teachers do not want to simply hand these students workbooks and turn them loose, I would like to specify a number of principles that will guide teachers in planning curricula and lessons for the non-English speaking

students in their classrooms. Underlying these principles are a couple of basic assumptions I make. First, I do not believe that the normal teacher has time for giving each non-English speaking student the full attention needed. Second, I believe that other students in the class can be best employed as peer tutors. They not only will know how to communicate to the English language learners better than the teacher, but also they will learn more about the English language themselves in having to teach it. And third, the students learning English usually have a built-in motivation to learn English greater than any the teacher could possibly create: they need to communicate to other students.

I will state these principles as though I were giving them to you as hints on how you can best learn a foreign language if you find yourself in a foreign country unable to speak its language. Then, I will specify some of the implications of the principles for the classroom teacher. If it appears that I am asking my audience to be a bit schizophrenic, what I hope I am doing is showing that the teaching techniques follow from real language-learning conditions. Principle 1: Assume that what people are saying around you has something to do with what is going on at the moment. Implications: As a teacher, distinguish formal classrcom talk with informal talk. Often in our teaching we make side-comments to students or digress. For English-speaking students, this is no problem, but for students who do not understand the language, such a mixture may confuse them when they are trying to figure out what is going on. So, perhaps the

teacher might stand in a certain place when giving formal instructions or adopt a definite instruction-giving voice, as opposed to the casual talk voice.

Principle 2: Grab a phrase and pretend you belong. Implications: Language learners experience a great feeling of exhilaration when they communicate with native speakers. It's sort of a magic moment, one that tells the language learners that they have been accepted and one that convinces native speakers that the learners care about them, their culture, and their country. So the teacher can provide the learner with key phrases at first, phrases that will help the learner in the class. "Please take out your books." "Please pass in your papers." "Please turn to page _____." "Please listen quietly." Such statements or others are common for the classroom and essential for students to function well in classes. Perhaps when the learner first arrives in the classroom, the teacher can give the student a map of the room with objects and their names clearly marked, and then take the student around the room to the objects: blackboard, desk, map, door, window, chalk, pencil sharpener, clock, wall, floor, lights --and any others that are so common we tend to take them for granted.

Soon the learner will need to learn phatic expressions, phrases and statements that express and maintain relations, but that have no direct meaning other than social strokes we give one another: "Have a nice day!" "How's it doing?" "You don't say!" Some of the things we say in class have no literal logic, yet native speakers understand what they mean: "Would you like

to pass your paper in." Not a question, but an order. "Do you mind if I . . .?" How would we feel if a student said that she did mind? And native speakers use fillers that are used to kill time while the brain tries to function: "You know, like, uh, I mean . . ."

Principle 3: Look for language patterns, certain words and phrases that occur over and over. Inplications: As a teacher, don't be afraid to repeat what you say. I know that many teachers make it a point of not repeating in order to train students to listen and to be responsible, but with a non-English speaking student, that practice has to be put aside. And speak naturally, perhaps a bit slower than normal, but not artificially so. People speak in many ways: they shout, whisper, slur their words, use slang; and a person learning a new language has to be able to function in all conditions. When using your language in front of that language learner, be alert for the ways native speakers naturally speak. For example, if we ask, "What is this?" we do not expect to hear, "This is a book." Pather, the native speaker will say, "A book." And we hardly ever hear an American enunciate clearly and discinctly, "I am going to . . . " Rather, the speaker might say, "I'm gonna" or I'ngna" or, at best, "I'm goin tuh . . . " Essentially, early lessons should deal with the most common things a listener is likely to hear.

Principle 4: Don't be afraid to use whatever you know, however faulty. Implications: Encourage students as much as possible. Be positive - always. Don't emphasize the negative, "No, you're wrong" whenever a student makes a mistake, but try variations

as, "Alright, let's try again" or "Not bad, but we need to work on . . . " And correct students reasonably. Don't expect perfection. Nevertheless, the teacher should continue to model correctness. It works for mothers and fathers teaching their children to speak. It will work for both the classroom teacher and the peers when teaching the non-English speaker to speak the new language. We know that extroverts learn second languages more readily than do introverts, so a teacher's task is one of making students feel more comfortable about trying new language strategies, even if mistakes do occur.

Principle 5: Work on learning the most important aspects of language first - you can always improve later. Implications: Don't correct every error that the language learner makes. If the learner says, "I know nothing," you know what the student means. You might model, "You don't know anything?" But don't emphasize the error unless the student has advanced to a point where more subtle aspects of language can be emphasized. Young children learn their first language by experimenting, trying something, seeing if it elicits the desired response, and then practicing the correct form over and over. That's the pattern we should promote in our classrooms. Remember, for example, that even native speakers do not speak absolutely correctly at all times: "Who you going with?" "You understand?" "Understand?"

If you understand what the student intends, respond accordingly, no matter how faulty the student's usage. You can always design a lesson later to correct those faults. The principle is parallel to that in teaching writing: concentrate on what the

student says first and how the student says it second. In some of their research, Dulay and Burt (1974) found that second language learners made the same types of errors that first language learners made 88% of the time. Only 5% of the errors were due to first language interference with the second language, and all the rest were purely idiosyncratic errors. So, the process of learning a second language naturally may not be extremely different from learning one's native language, whatever it happens to be.

Principle 6: If you want to find out how to say something, ask someone who knows. Implications: As soon as the non-English speaker joins the class, establish some student-to-student relationships. Introduce the new student to an English-speaking student that you know will be glad to help. Develop lessons that peer tutors can follow without verbal instructions from you, perhaps a series of file folders with instructions for the tutor and materials for both tutor and learner. By developing such relationships, you, the teacher, are free to handle the rest of the class with regular lessons. But, at the same time, you should be prepared to allow the tutor and language learner or other pee and the language learner to talk while you are talking, as long as they do not interfere with the class. In that manner, the learner can ask for immediate help in understanding what is going on in the class.

So that you do not discourage the student from asking for help, accept the accents of the language learner. Accents do not interfere with comprehension; they just create psychological blocks on the parts of certain listeners. Furthermore, in order

to encourage an accent approximating that of native speakers, we should never teach vocabulary words in isolation. By themselves, words are seldom pronounced the way they are in strings of words.

Occasionally, you will need to ask the language learners if they understand what is being said. Try not to ask, "Do you understand?" It is too easy for the language learner to respond with one word, yes or no. If the student does not understand, re-word what you have said. If the student continues not understanding, ask a peer to explain. Often the peers are much more adept at communicating than the teacher.

Principle 7: Find as many different situations to speak in as possible. Implications: Provide some chances for the non-English speaker to socialize, with peers, in extracurricular activities, with teachers both formally and informally, perhaps even having to report on some of the language observations the student makes in those situations. For example, how do students greet one another in the cafeteria? The teacher may want to develop assignments and lessons that relate to telephone talk, dealing with parents, entertaining others, writing letters of complaint, or any of an enormous range of social communication situations.

In making assignments, the teacher might provide some choices. In the early stages, language learners might choose the less threatening or more interesting tasks. As they develop more confidence, their willingness to accept language challenges will increase. Toward that end, the learner should be involved with peer tutoring, individual learning centers, full class

exercises, and small group discussions. Each will provide new contexts for language use.

Principle 8: Learn how to speak the language first, and reading and writing can then follow along a close second. Implications: The first tasks for the language learner should be oral. If we try to teach the learner through the printed page alone, we will end up with a speaker who does not understand natural intonations and who does not learn to communicate spontaneously. Older students will be more adept at learning from abstract rules, but they still will learn more rapidly if they are forced to use the language in real communication contexts.

The question of whether one should learn to speak a language first and then to write it in a way parallels that of whether writing should be taught as a process or a product. In their article " A TESOL Model for Native-Language Writing Instruction: In Search of a Model for the Teaching of Writing," (1981) Esau and Keene note, among seven basic principles of TESOL models, the distinction between acquisition, or unconscious internalization of language and learning, or conscious internalization of language. In the learning mode, no matter how much we drill students on grammar, style, or organizing principles, unless they also work in the acquisition mode, they fail to learn to write in a fully functioning way and instead produce lifeless, albeit grammatically correct, prose. This is not to say that we should never give writing assignments to students, but that such assignments should be used to reveal their ability to function

in the language, not to teach them to function in the language. The teaching process should begin with the oral and move toward the written, while the way one structures words and ideas in writing is not the same way one structures words and ideas in speaking.

Principle 9: Learn to adapt your behavior to the culture of the native language you are learning. Implications: We need to prepare exercises (experiences) on meaningful cultural elements the non-English speaking student must learn. Language lessons can be built around such cultural aspects as student dress, both in school and out, popular dances, sports behaviors, both as a participant and a spectator, or mealtime behaviors. Students might clip articles from newspapers that deal with English words borrowed from the native language, current events related to the home country, and other items that will reveal U. S. attitudes and behaviors.

We can use the student as an important resource for our class, asking the student to tell us about the native country and customs. If possible, we can invite the student's parents in to tell us more. In that way, the student sees that we value the native country and culture and, in turn, begins to value our country, culture, and, of course, language.

We, in turn, should learn as much as possible about the student's culture so that we do not offend and possibly turn the student away from wanting to learn our language. For example, if the student comes from an Arab country, should we show that student the bottoms of our feet? If the student is Vietnamese, should we pat the student on the head when giving praise? If traditional Navaho,

should we point at the student with our finger when calling for an answer or response?

In general, what I have been arguing for is an approach that makes as much use of peer tutors as possible, so that the teacher is free to deal with the rest of the class. I am arguing for involving the English language learner as much as possible in real communication situations, especially those with peers. And I am arguing that we should emphasize the oral language approach first, while delaying the need to learn from the printed page until the student has acquired basic spoken feeling for the language and is comfortable with some basic English communication skills. All this is only a start, but a start that will eventually move the English language learner to become a more fully-functioning user of the language.

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